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# Homosexuality in *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975): televisual surfaces and a 'natural' man

## Introduction

*Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), directed by Sidney Lumet and starring Al Pacino, has indisputable significance as 'the first American commercial movie in which the star/identification figure turns out to be gay,' as Robin Wood observed shortly after its release (33). Despite this, it remains neglected in academic scholarship, the exception being Fredric Jameson's seminal 1977 article on the film (843-859), which does not discuss its representation of sexuality. This theme cannot be adequately accounted for, I will argue, without first investigating what Lumet referred to as the film's 'naturalistic' aesthetic, which in visual terms is usefully defined in relation to the forms of television and documentary. But more broadly, what does 'naturalistic' mean, in this context, and why might this be significant as far as the representation of homosexuality in *Dog Day Afternoon* is concerned?

The film was adapted from real-life events which had occurred on 22 August 1972, when John Wojtowicz and his accomplice Salvatore Naturile had held up a branch of the Chase Manhattan Bank in Brooklyn. The building was surrounded by more than one hundred police officers, and the eight employees of the bank consequently taken hostage at gunpoint, in a siege that would last over eight hours. Around three thousand local residents and curiosity seekers were drawn to the scene by radio and television accounts of the event. It emerged that Wojtowicz was demanding the release from hospital of Ernest Aaron, whom he had married in a drag wedding ceremony, and whose gender reassignment operation he was seeking to finance. After hours of negotiation, the gunmen requested that a car transport them and the

hostages to Kennedy airport, from where they hoped to escape by plane. But once at the airport, they were overwhelmed: Naturile was shot dead by FBI agents, and Wojtowicz was arrested.

In adapting the events of that day, *Dog Day Afternoon* dealt with what we now tend to refer to as a 'media circus.' Reviewing the film, one critic observed that the television set in the bank 'shows holdup men and victims what is happening at the time it is happening, and this is one of the intellectual points of the film: that behaviour is controlled and amended by being publicly reported' (Gilliatt 95). Circuses need freaks, of course – something unusual or strange, monstrous deviations from nature – and the association of the 'freaky' with the straight exploitation of sexual nonconformity has long been contentious. Prior to Lumet's involvement, indeed, the film had started out as an exploitation picture entitled 'The Boys in the Bank' (Kluge and Moore 66). Lumet repeatedly claimed, however, that his aim was to show that 'freaks are not the freaks we think they are. We are much more connected to the most outrageous behaviour than we know or admit' (*MM* 14). Critiquing the implication of outlandishness associated with the media circus, I will suggest, Lumet sought not only to make his freaky protagonist appear normal, he sought to make him appear 'natural.'

It is by now well-established that the construction of 'natural' behavior in American screen acting is just that – a construction. But in dismissing, as Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke recently have (160), the persisting notion that performance is captured rather than actively crafted, it becomes difficult to construct a framework to account for films that *do*, despite everything, emphasize the documentary-like 'capturing' of performance as a guarantee of authenticity. As such, the representation of homosexuality in *Dog Day Afternoon* is arguably most significant not because of its differences from, but instead because of its similarities to, the typical kind of aesthetic which defined the cinema of the New Hollywood c. 1967-1976, in films such as *Five Easy Pieces* (Bob Rafelson 1970), *The French Connection* (William Friedkin 1971), *Mean Streets* (Martin Scorsese 1973), and *A Woman Under the Influence* (John

Cassavetes 1974). Films such as these are routinely designated 'naturalistic,' and in this respect, I believe it is useful to consider them in terms derived from 'Naturalism,' the literary movement that came into being in the late nineteenth century, originally defined and epitomized by the French writer Émile Zola.

Tending to concern itself with life at the impoverished margins of society, Naturalism drew on Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, emphasizing the importance of environmental and hereditary factors in determining human behavior. Naturalism was further influenced by Victorian ideas of thermodynamics, identified as a theory of physics by William Thomson in 1854. Critics such as Barri Gold and Bruce Clarke have argued for the significance of thermodynamics in Victorian literature, the creative implications of the discovery that energy in the universe remains constant, but is consistently being converted into unusable forms – 'widely experienced as the scientific basis for universal pessimism; it seemed to promise only decay, dissipation, degradation, and death' (Gold 41). The latter concept of 'entropy,' referring to the rate at which the energy of a given system is converted into irrevocable forms, emerged as a structuring feature of Naturalism.

I follow Dudley Andrew's designation of Naturalism as being fundamentally an 'impulse,' however – one which was important to cinema from its earliest years, and outlasted the literary movement (302). Identifying *Ratcatcher* (Lynne Ramsay 1999) as a work of Naturalism, David Trotter draws on George Bataille's concept of the 'formless,' which drove the writer-philosopher's obsession with waste-matter and entropy:

> The formless, in Bataille's usage, is not just a term for that which has lost its form. It is rather an operation, at once social and aesthetic, to produce or to exploit formlessness. It is an act of declassing and declassification which brings things down in the world by ruthlessly exposing their materiality. (152)

Many films made in the New Hollywood period were preoccupied with this type of exposure, with themes of entropy and waste endemic: Arlo Guthrie is arrested for dumping litter in *Alice's Restaurant* (Arthur Penn 1969); Steve McQueen tumbles out of a garbage truck in *The Getaway* (Sam Peckinpah 1972); Martin Sheen plays a garbage disposal worker in *Badlands* (Terrence Malick 1974); in *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese 1976), Travis Bickle thanks God for the rain 'which has helped wash the garbage and the trash off the sidewalks,' before attempting a violent clean-up operation of his own.

This is not the place to discuss the reasons for the emergence of a new kind of American film protagonist c. 1967, one who might usefully be conceived in terms of waste matter; in terms of a cultural preoccupation with the rejected, the abandoned, and the superfluous (by way of explanation, film histories point, for example, to perceived national failure, the trauma of the Vietnam war, the collapse of countercultural idealism, changing industry conditions, and the perception of masculine superfluity in the wake of the feminist challenge). What interests me here is instead the significance of *Dog Day Afternoon*'s representation of homosexuality, in the context of this more general tendency between 1967 and 1976 to adopt a 'naturalistic' approach.

## 'Tight naturalistic surfaces'

Lumet established himself at CBS during the 'golden age' of live television. His first feature film was *12 Angry Men* (1957), an adaptation of a teleplay that had initially aired on the CBS program *Studio One* in 1954. In setting the action almost entirely in a single room, Lumet made his first impact, Gordon Gow argues, 'not by seizing upon the expansiveness of the big-screen medium, but by contrast to its usual processes' (56). Many of the director's subsequent films – *Fail-Safe* (1964), *The Offence* (1972), *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974), *Equus* (1977), and also *Dog Day Afternoon* – exploited claustrophobic spaces to sustain a focus on

capturing psychological realism in performance. Lumet employed far more tight close-ups than was usual in a Hollywood film, with many shots longer than average: a static shot of Henry Fonda having a telephone conversation in *Fail-Safe* is five minutes in duration.

It is not my intention to overplay the differences between the 'cinematic' and the 'televisual,' for as Martin McLoone remarks, in the bulk of Hollywood cinema, 'tight framing, fluid editing and dialogue have always been as important as epic sweep' (81). The difference is, as Charles Barr explains, that television 'was developed as a device for capturing and showing images simultaneously, or virtually so: images of the present, not of the past' (53). Lumet remarked that he was 'very caught up in life and involved, and I love TV's immediacy' (Sterritt 71); in *Dog Day Afternoon*, he sought to construct, as far as possible, a televisual sense of immediacy and liveness. Lumet wanted his film to be as 'naturalistic' as possible, which he defined as being 'as close to documentary filmmaking as one can get in a scripted movie.' 'The entire attempt here,' he explained, 'was to make sure that you never felt it was a movie, that you felt in essence you were watching a newsreel' (*MM* 54-55).

An unusual amount of attention was devoted to creating a diagesis that felt visually, spatially, and aurally 'immediate.' The film was shot entirely on location in Brooklyn, near the site of the original robbery. A lower warehouse floor was rented and transformed into a bank set, enabling free movement between the interior and the street (Lumet, *MM* 100). Ordinary ceiling lighting was used, with added fluorescence for exposure. There was no score, and sound was kept 'absolutely pure and intact,' with the editor ensuring that the noise of the crowd on the left and right hand sides of the street came out of the corresponding speakers, preserving 'the physical aspect of what was going on outside' (Lumet, *DVD*). In telephone conversations, Pacino's phone was rigged up to the actors over the road, whose voices he could hear (Lumet, *MM* 121).

Lumet was at his best, one critic remarked, when offering 'a fractured kind of movie-making, where emotional and social conflict is grist for the dynamics of live TV drama and the colliding viewpoints of TV reportage' (Combs 237). Tellingly, critics then and now describe *Dog Day Afternoon* in terms of its breadth, as an assemblage of flat pieces, rather than depth. One referred to its 'tight naturalistic surfaces,' another to its 'shallows' (Kauffmann 20, Bilbow 12). Others conceived the film as a 'collage' or a 'patchwork,' or claimed that its strength lay 'in its depiction of surfaces' (Combs 237, Turner, *Time Out*). In narrative terms, this impression results from the constrictions placed on space and time. The audience is not shown from where the characters emerge, nor what happened to them prior to their appearance onscreen. We only witness them experiencing the present.

The impression of shallowness or flatness is also visual. For the majority of the film, the camera is placed within the confined space of the bank set, which features numerous flat, vertical surfaces: ceiling-to-floor windows, exterior walls of plaster and painted brick, interior office walls, cupboards, doors, blinds, cardboard signs, noticeboards, and brushed concrete pillars. Plainly colored and often unadorned, these surfaces are frequently used to screen off background space, in effect shallowing depth, and adding to the sense of claustrophobia. These unremarkable surfaces are prominent in several important scenes in the film. When Sonny dictates his will, for instance, Lumet shoots Pacino in a medium close-up, as he first rests his face against a concrete pillar, then leans his hand against the pillar to prop himself up.

However, if the use of shallow focus increases in the film's second half, such as in the eight-minute telephone conversation between Sonny and his lover Leon, then it is not the case that all material is deliberately shot in this manner. The scenes shot outside the confines of the bank, or looking out of the bank, for instance, have far greater depth of field (deep focus is even used at one point, to show the detective in the shop opposite). Whatever the topography of the space allows the audience to see, in other words, we tend to see in focus – nothing

physically present is deliberately withheld from view. One critic remarked, indeed, that Lumet cuts to the aerial view of helicopter 'for no particular reason' (Combs 237) – a point worth pursuing! For it is important to note, and I will return to this later, that what Lumet's camera does capture within its field, it tends to capture with an apparent lack of *discrimination*.

Jameson believed that *Dog Day Afternoon* had moved beyond earlier attempts to tackle the relationship between film and historical fact, and was distinguished by

> its unity of form and content: we are made sure in the illusion that the camera is witnessing everything exactly as it happened and that what it sees is all there is. The camera is absolute presence and absolute truth: thus, the aesthetic of representation collapses the density of the historical event, and flattens it back out into fiction. (848)

As such, Jameson argues that the film's significance lies not in its ostensible subject matter, but instead in the 'new visibility of something more fundamental in what might otherwise simply seem the background itself' (851). But in contrast to what Jameson gleans about the ghettoization of older urban neighborhoods, there is little to be learnt about homosexuality in this respect. In emphasizing the robbery as a live, immediate event, Lumet spares himself the depiction of the gay Greenwich Village environs from which Wojtowicz had emerged, whilst Wood noted that in the crowd scenes, 'the lateral track along the line of gay militants reveals all the usual stock figures that represent the popular concept of the overt homosexual' (35).

The significance of the film's representation of homosexuality is to be found neither in visual nor narrative depth, but exists only as a component of Jameson's historical event – which Lumet 'flattens' out. The film's focus on Pacino, who is barely offscreen, and generally shot in medium close-up or close-up, is presumably crucial. The blandness of the office surfaces in the background further direct attention to the star in the foreground, in visual proximity to the audience throughout. It is here, arguably, that the televisual sense of immediacy becomes most

useful to Lumet. Misha Kavka has defined television technology as operating in terms of a 'proxemic relation to actuality,' arguing that TV functions as a 'fiction of presence' rather than representation (4). In the use it makes of its star, there is something of this televisual 'fiction of presence' at work in *Dog Day Afternoon*, the nature of which I will shortly investigate.

Tellingly, critics referred to the Pacino's performance in terms of a surface concealing depth. He gives a 'sympathetic performance as a man whose shallows are deeper than they seem,' one wrote, whilst another claimed that with his actors, Lumet had worked with 'enough control and enough relaxation to create tight naturalistic surfaces that evoke ambiguous inward states' (Bilbow 12, Kauffmann 20). In one sense this works to circumscribe carefully the film's representation of sexuality. Denied Sonny's back-story, the audience does not learn that he is gay until halfway through the film. In such a context, the 'based on a true story' element became useful, Wood suggested, as 'a possible means of getting subversive, off-beat or slightly scandalous material past studio executives ('But we're just telling what happened')' (33).

But it also kept the filmmakers' own prejudices in check. For in the brief moments when Lumet does strive for 'depth' of character by explicitly identifying a subtext, the film resorts to the over-familiar, pop-psychological explanations for homosexuality conventionally favored by Hollywood. The women were the main casualties; critics complained that the depiction of Sonny's overprotective mother and his overbearing wife were totally over-the-top (Kroll 84, Champlin 30). Even Wojtowicz, watching the film in prison, complained that 'the actress playing my mother overdid her role, especially the overprotective Mother-type baloney in it,' and disliked the way his wife was made 'the scapegoat for everything that happened, especially because of the Gay aspects involved' (31-32).

## 'The documentary is mine'

*Dog Day Afternoon* did not simply replicate earlier forms of live television, but instead seemed to anticipate later developments, as Pacino has suggested:

> It was the first time when the pizza boy delivers the pizza and turns around and says, 'I'm a star!' That was the first time that kind of recognition *vis à vis* TV and the real world was shown. In a way it was reality TV. (31)

Yet when writing the character of Sonny, screenwriter Frank Pierson reconfigured the impression he had got of Wojtowicz, whom he had met and whom he considered

> very needy… an actor for the reason of just simply wanting to hold your attention: 'Look at me, look at me, look at me, look at me, don't look away. I've got to keep your attention because the moment you look away, I don't exist any more.' ('The Story')

This is the impression given in a documentary directed by Walter Stokman, *Based on a True Story* (2005), which pieces together the events of the Wojtowicz robbery, and includes audio interviews with the ex-convict. Boisterously charismatic, Wojtowicz puts on a tough, macho act, jokingly threatening the director's life ('I know where you live') and continually exaggerating his own importance as a public figure ('do you know how many thousands of people will come just to see me?'). Haggling over financial matters, he announces to Stokman that 'the documentary is not yours, the documentary is mine.'

In the making of the 2005 documentary, and during the 1972 robbery, Wojtowicz fed off public attention, sought to exploit it, and feared losing it. As such, *Dog Day Afternoon* deserves consideration in the context of the gay-themed 'Andy Warhol' films directed by Paul Morrissey, such as *Flesh* (1968), *Trash* (1970), and *Heat* (1972). Taking up Warhol's renowned notion of 'fifteen minutes of fame,' these films gave nobodies the chance to be stars, and the behavior of the performers is modified as a result of their awareness of the camera's presence – just as witnesses alleged had been the case with Wojtowicz in the robbery.

Mostly shot employing a shallow depth of field, the Warhol films have something of the televisual 'flatness' that reviewers detected in *Dog Day Afternoon*: 'Morrissey heightens thematic obsessiveness with a flat narrative so relentlessly static, so compulsively shallow, that it possesses the formal energy usually derived from the dynamics of depth' (Colaciello 58). This was, moreover, intentional. Claiming that movies were 'passing through a kind of television state,' Morrissey remarked in 1974 that his films operated in terms of

> a kind of modern sensibility that Andy understands… It's a kind of carelessness. People watch television today and television has no plan. Johnny Carson is just very literal photography of people speaking. Television and news broadcasts, they're just information received through mechanical means. This is a modern notion, that the technology itself is adequate. People themselves are the information. The content is interesting – it should be. (24)

Take the scene in *Flesh*, in which star Joe Dallesandro adopts a variety of Greco-Roman sculptural poses for an older artist who sketches him. In an earlier Hollywood period, any queer appeal would have been sublimated, whilst in gay pornography it was embraced (in the beefcake photos from Dallesandro's early career, he poses tense and oiled against a black backdrop, carefully lit in high contrast). But in *Flesh*, there is no specialized lighting emphasizing Joe's muscles and curves, no flattering angles. The setting, a seedy-looking bedroom, is incongruous, and the camera makes no attempt to keep mundane objects (a bed, pictures in frames, shelves, a telephone, an objet d'art) out of shot. The motivation behind the scene is certainly queer; but critically, Morrissey's camera lends the impression of ambivalence, strange given the subject matter. It captures every inch of Joe's body, but importantly does so via the kind of observational 'carelessness,' the apparent absence of motivation or discrimination, that Morrissey refers to as being typical of television.

A similar approach is evident in *Dog Day Afternoon*, for instance, in the scene that takes place just after it has been revealed that Sonny is gay. In contrast to Sal, who is agitated after being incorrectly identified as homosexual by news reporters, Sonny seems entirely unfazed by matters of sexuality – 'it's just a freak show to them anyway. It don't matter.' But crucially, the film itself appears equally as unfazed. In what might, in a movie with a different agenda, have been rendered as a sensational 'reveal' scene, Lumet simply has Pacino pace the room, mopping his brow and muttering about his plane being late. The initial shot, moreover, frames Sonny amongst a variety of other objects (a vase of flowers, a counter, a shotgun, a chair, a rack of files). The camera, as in *Flesh*, does not appear to discriminate; Sonny is filmed as just one physical object amongst many.

In this visual approach, both Lumet and Morrissey are further influenced (as is later reality TV), by what Bill Nichols identifies as the 'observational mode' of documentary, which 'stresses the nonintervention of the filmmaker. Such films cede "control" over the events that occur in front of the camera more than any other mode' (38). Lumet is clearly aware that the scene examined above is terribly important; a protagonist played by a Hollywood star has just been outed for the first time in cinematic history. But he doesn't let on. The director's approach seems 'actively passive,' to use the term with which Jennifer Doyle has categorized Dallesandro in the Warhol films (198-199). Like an observational documentary, *Dog Day Afternoon* pretends to cede control over the events unfolding in front of the camera; like television, it evidences an apparent carelessness that secretly cares.

At the end of the scene, Sonny stops to stare at a bank clerk, mocking her judgmental look and remarking that she 'shouldn't let something like that [his homosexuality] spoil her fun.' Pacino's unblinking, wide-eyed stare here is interesting. For what has since emerged as the film's iconic image, and which now appears on the cover of all DVD releases, is a black-and-white sketch of the top half of Pacino's face, his wide eyes peeping above the bold red

title. The star is reticent and coy, or more precisely, as one critic noted, he is 'acting cute and confused' using 'his big, sorrowful eyes' (Landau 3). This works to establish Sonny as an innocent – a bewildered Naturalist victim of environment and circumstance – whilst simultaneously establishing him as an object of gay desire.

Is Pacino's affect of cute and confused comparable to Dallesandro's affect of boredom and disinterest – both being 'actively passive'? Perhaps not, for to a far greater extent than *Dog Day Afternoon*, the 'Warhol' films seem to anticipate what Christopher Pullen has identified as the carnivalesque tendency of reality television to erode distinctions between performer and spectator (71-77). The films break the rules of Hollywood diegesis, exploiting the performers' freakiness (as real-life transvestites, hustlers, transsexuals, and drug addicts) to queer, camp effect: they deliver dialogue in an ironic manner, look at people off-camera, and can be seen trying to make each other laugh. In contrast, *Dog Day Afternoon* offers no opportunity for transgressive or queer performances of this kind. If there are moments that blur performer and role (footage of the exhausted Pacino starting to cry during a telephone conversation made its way into the final cut) then Lumet was aware that this had its limits:

> As authentic as we were, as well as using all of the naturalistic elements… I *had a camera* in there, finally it is an artificial creation, a script, a director, actors, it is not 'the truth.' It's one of the reasons that today I laugh when I hear about 'reality' television, because the minute you put a camera in there, how real is it? It's totally fake from beginning to end. (DVD commentary)

That said, *Dog Day Afternoon*'s fakeness is of a different order than that of the 'Warhol' films, or later reality TV. Even within the narrative, Sonny plays the crowd outside the bank for largely pragmatic reasons. The scene for which the film is most remembered is that in which he rabble-rouses by yelling 'Attica!' at the crowd (a reference to the 1971 prison riot in which the intervention of state police led to thirty-nine deaths, generating public

outrage). Sonny cultivates public opinion in his favor, but as an anti-authoritarian folk hero, never as a homosexual. Nor does he seem particularly driven by a need for public attention.

*Dog Day Afternoon* insists that the McLuhanite media circus is something external to Sonny, something that he might exploit, but in which his essential 'self' will never be lost. Does this confirm the film's allegiance to what Kavka refers to as the myth of 'a real, camera-free self, which remains after we have separated out those wannabe celebrities who act for the camera' and which corresponds in Judith Butler's terms 'to the place of the essential self, that core of identity which is mistakenly held to motivate behaviours'? (103). Yet *Dog Day Afternoon* withholds depth of character to the extent that we are never given any indication as to what Sonny's 'essential self' or 'core identity' might be, either. So again, the question: in what way is the film's representation of homosexuality significant?

## 'I'm dying'

Lumet remarked that Sonny was a 'dese-dem-and-doser – a punk with no intellectual aspirations and the most ordinary kind of life. He lived off welfare' (cit. Gow 54). In this sense, *Dog Day Afternoon* adopts Naturalism's tendency to focus on the impoverished margins of society, its Darwinist emphasis on human behavior being determined by environmental and hereditary factors. And as a Hollywood film released in 1975, *Dog Day Afternoon* was surely significant in the way it showed social and homosexual exclusion to be intertwined. For literary precursors, one might look to works such as James Baldwin's *Another Country* (1962), John Rechy's *City of Night* (1963), or Hubert Selby Jr's *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1964). But film and television, Stanley Kauffman observed, had

> dealt with homosexuality generally as the province of the cultivated and 'artistic.' But this is hard-hat country… The matter-of-course acceptance of Pacino's relationship here is not a try for sensationalism nor a manifest of latter-

> day broadmindedness: it's an acknowledgement of conditions that are taken for granted by that sector of society. (21)

Sonny's idiosyncratic catchphrase, 'I'm dying,' gives the impression of having been habitually and compulsively repeated in the past. It could easily be the mock-heroic remark of a working-class breadwinner, wearily returning home after a hard day at work; it might also refer to Sonny's exclusion as a homosexual. When a cop outside the bank offers him a deal that sounds too good to be true, Sonny responds by blowing him a kiss, retorting, 'Kiss me. When I'm being fucked I like to get kissed a lot.' He speaks as a member of an underclass that is used to 'being fucked', while confirming the innate homophobia of these discourses: he is doubly excluded, because for him, 'being fucked' in a sexual sense might well be a good thing. Sonny is rejected from a mainstream whose legitimacy is called into question, and as such, is capable of inducing the feelings of aversion typically evoked by waste. As evidenced by Richard Schickel: 'one tries to be sympathetic, in the nothing-human-is-alien-to-me manner. But the viewer leaves the theater with that most devastating of disclaimers: this has nothing to do with me' (41).

Examining the ironies of Sonny's criminality in this respect, Vito Russo remarked,

> As for whether or not it is a good thing for us to have yet one more negative image to add to our collection of homosexual screen villains, well, I'm not so sure that [Wojtowicz] was a villain after all… Any volunteers for doing something equally spectacular but 'respectable' in public? All you have to do is give them your real name, you know. (37)

He is referring to the practice whereby homosexuals would not disclose their true identities when arrested by police for 'soliciting' or attending gay bars, the kind of discriminatory targeting that formed a context of the Stonewall riots. *The Village Voice* reported several GAA (Gay Activists Alliance) meetings 'in which conservative and radical gays debated over

whether Wojtowicz was a counterrevolutionary lumpen adventurer victimized by the mob or a proud gay superfly caught in an act of righteous expropriation' (Holm 3-4). A few years later, *Dog Day Afternoon* was announced as a 'gay bank robbery film' on the cover of *Gay Scene*, a New York underground magazine, which featured Pacino in a strong, forthright pose. He leans his body forward by resting one arm on his knee, exuding physical confidence, looking directly at the camera. His pose suggests resolve and empowerment.

Pacino's reappropriation of a 1950s Method acting style does not so much 'queer' the earlier performances of Montgomery Clift, Marlon Brando and James Dean, as focus attention on what was pretty queer in the first place. The jittery, hysterical energy of Pacino's performance cannot but draw attention to what earlier critics would have referred to euphemistically as the 'feminine' aspects of the Method. Indeed, the term 'hysteria' was coined by Hippocrates to describe what was considered a female condition in which the wandering uterus led to feelings of suffocation and madness. 1950s films often attempted closure of these feelings, in problematic ways. In *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray 1955), Leo Braudy argues, 'for Jim to become a man, it seems that he must help kill off Plato – the ethnic, gay, intelligent, misfit self' (21), a description which fits Sonny in *Dog Day Afternoon* rather well.

In contrast to these earlier dynamics of psychological determinism and closure, Pacino's Method performance in *Dog Day Afternoon* arguably has more in common with what Maria Viera terms the 'neo-naturalistic' work of Cassavetes, which

> does not seek this clarity of intention – either through his dialogue or through the performances he elicits from his actors. The basic actions and reactions of his characters come from multiple and often divergent subtexts that play out simultaneously. (163)

Lumet similarly adopts a 'neo-naturalistic' form that tends to exclude all subtext, or more precisely, renders it unknowable. Nick Davis has remarked that Sonny is 'less a victim of

sexual oppression than a volcanic intersection-point of multiple injustices that only he, in his raging and inarticulate way, is able to connect' ('Dog Day Afternoon').

Jameson argues that in Pacino's 'second generation' Method performance, Sonny's gesture of revolt 'projected' – it was understood by suburban movie-going audiences who identified with the character (849-850). 'The inarticulate,' Jameson argues, 'becomes the highest form of expressiveness, the wordless stammer proves voluble, and the agony over uncommunicatability suddenly turns out to be everywhere fluently comprehensible' (850). But this is nonetheless to acknowledge that onscreen, we are still faced with a performance that denies access to depth. Whatever subtext lies beneath its surface is, as Jameson notes, *not* articulated, *not* expressed in words, *not* communicated. In examining the process whereby audiences came to identify with Sonny, Pacino's performance is thus most usefully approached in terms of its surface, perhaps best described as 'neo-naturalistic.'

For *Dog Day Afternoon* does something more than simply 'capture' a 'natural' performance in the manner of an observational documentary or a newsreel. Instead its approach seems to have something in common with literary Naturalism's tendency to a form of 'description' which David Baguley argues is

> in a sense allegorical, but in a concrete form…it may more accurately be defined less as 'de-scription' than as the 'in-scription' of a fundamental drama of the material world, analogous to the human dramas of the plot, involving the dissolutions of the forms of the environment which decompose before the eyes of the reader or of the intradiagetic observer. (200)

If *Dog Day Afternoon* shares this Naturalist impulse to 'inscribe' decomposition, then where does it do this? Recall Morrissey's debt to television when directing the Warhol films: 'people themselves are the information. The content is interesting – it should be' (24). Lumet's approach is arguably similar. Sonny/Pacino is himself the information. His material presence,

rendered more tangible, immediate and live as a result of the film's adoption of televisual forms, is where the Naturalist themes of entropy are inscribed.

In a thermodynamic sense, the claustrophobic bank location becomes a closed system in which Sonny's energy will gradually dissipate and degrade – his catchphrase, 'I'm dying,' is an entropic remark if ever there was one. When the bank manager impatiently asks Sonny when he is 'going to get the ball rolling' with his escape plan, Sonny's stream-of-consciousness response evidences the inevitable strain of the situation in which he finds himself:

> Yeah we're gonna get the ball rolling. What do you think I'm doing? I'm working on it, right, what does it look like? You think it's easy? You know I've gotta keep them [the cops] cooled out, I've gotta keep all you people happy, I've gotta have all the ideas, and I've gotta do it all alone. I'm working on it – you wanna try it?

Sonny is *working on it* – he is laboring, exerting himself, using up energy. Take Pacino's performance in the moment that immediately follows Sonny's telephone conversations with his lover and his wife. With one brief cutaway (of about one second) to the doctor observing, the star is shot in an unbroken close-up; there is no dialogue. The audience watches as Pacino sighs, lowers his head, and wipes his brow with the handkerchief that he is clutching. Then he wraps his hands around his head, and stares ahead, wide-eyed and desperately. His lip trembles and he closes his eyes, then sinks his head down and starts to cry. He looks up again, fighting tears, and shakes his head. This action takes place over half a minute, and focuses the audience's attention entirely on physical performance, on moving flesh. There is a narrative purpose, certainly – identification – but the audience is simultaneously meant to witness what Trotter refers to as the Naturalist act of declassing, a process 'which brings things down in the world by ruthlessly exposing their materiality' (152).

Tellingly, Pacino gives his character a recurring facial tick; a slight, twitchy blink. This is used to interesting effect in the film's trailer, at the end of which the robbers are shown getting into the police car with the hostages. 'We did it,' Sonny says, confident that he and Sal have been successful in their escape. A split second afterwards, there is a cut to a frontal angle of Pacino, who blinks, with his usual twitch. There is then a cut to an aerial shot and the trailer ends. Crucially, the shot with Pacino blinking does not appear at this moment in the actual film (in which it is cut in later): it has been inserted at this point in the trailer for a reason. The facial tick is there to contradict Sonny's claim that they have succeeded. 'We did it,' he says – 'No he didn't,' the blink informs the audience.

A reality defined in terms of a material repetitive disorder, something over which Sonny has no control, has the last word. This reminds us that cinematic Naturalism is most critically a *process* of material exposure, unconcerned with causes or explanations, or with providing meaning. Adopting this form, but featuring a gay protagonist, *Dog Day Afternoon* confirms that Naturalism's entropic process of declassification has one harsh virtue: if nothing else, it does not discriminate. 'I'm dying,' Sonny says – and that is all the audience needs to know. In this sense, the significance of *Dog Day Afternoon* is surely that it renders homosexuality in a 'naturalistic' manner, an achievement all the more impressive considering the freaky, sensationalized context of the 'media circus.' Was Sonny in *Dog Day Afternoon* Hollywood's first 'natural' homosexual? I think it is fair to say so, provided that the term 'natural' is distinguished from 'straight,' and is furthermore understood in a non-essentialist manner, in the context of other American films made in the period 1967-1976.

The emphasis on Sonny's immediate, live, disintegrating materiality results in a visible waste product: sweat. This is, after all, produced on a 'dog day afternoon,' which refers to a hot summer afternoon: the name of the dog star Sirius, which appears during the summer months, derives from the Greek *seirios*, meaning 'scorching.' Everyone in the bank is shown to be

suffering from the heat, but Pacino, especially, is absolutely drenched in sweat in the film's second half, continually mopping his brow with a handkerchief. This is accentuated when the overhead fluorescent lights are turned off, and replaced by more expressionistic side lighting that immediately picks up the shine of the sweat. Lumet insisted on applying the fake sweat (the only make-up used in the film) himself. He never let the make-up artists do it because it always ended up 'either too much, or too little, or too fake' (*DVD*).

Sweat encapsulates *Dog Day Afternoon*'s aesthetic. It is something over which we have no control; a waste product expelled for the health of the organism as a whole, connoting the entropic loss of energy. It signifies toil, and has historically been associated with the effort involved in laboring-class, manual work. It can be sexy; we produce it during sexual activity, and in a film so defined by surface, it is telling that sweat – a shallow layer of waste on the skin – is the one aspect of physical homoeroticism that does slip through. Who knows, sweat might even be political. David Carter writes that riots have tended to coincide with hot weather, apparently because it increases irritability, and lists excessive heat as a factor in sparking the Stonewall riots, which occurred on the first hot weekend of the summer of sixty-nine (257).

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